

Character Change & Theme: The Group Project — Teacher copy

Answers and suggested responses

Directions: Read the story below. Then, answer the questions that follow to analyze how the main character changes and how this change reveals the theme of the story.

The Synergy of Three

Maya stared at the assignment sheet, her stomach tightening. *Group Project: Design a Model of an Eco-Friendly City.* Beneath the title, the teacher had written three names: *Maya, Leo, and Sam.*

Maya sighed. Leo was known for drawing elaborate comic books during math class, and Sam was so quiet he practically blended into the classroom walls. *If I want an A, Maya thought, I'll have to do this entire project myself.*

At their first meeting, Leo bubbled with ideas. "What if we make a floating city with solar-powered balloons?" he suggested, sketching wildly on a napkin.

"That's not realistic, Leo," Maya interrupted, pulling out her neatly typed outline. "I've already structured our city. It will be a standard grid with wind turbines. I'll do the research and write the report. Leo, you can paint the cardboard base. Sam, just gather some plastic bottles for the buildings."

Leo's face fell, and he quietly tucked his sketchbook away. Sam opened his mouth as if to speak, but Maya was already assigning herself the next three tasks.

Over the next four days, Maya worked late into the night. She researched solar grids, drafted blueprints, and wrote the entire ten-page report. But by Thursday evening, the night before the project was due, disaster struck. The hot glue gun had clogged, half the plastic bottle buildings were collapsing, and her hand-drawn blueprints looked messy and rushed. She was exhausted, stressed, and far from finished.

A knock on her front door interrupted her panic. Leo and Sam stood on the porch, carrying a box of art supplies and a laptop.

"We figured you might be overwhelmed," Sam said softly. "I noticed on the shared document that the report was finished, but the model looked like a lot of work for one person."

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Maya looked at her messy, half-built model, then at her classmates. Her pride wrestled with her desperation. "I... I can't get the buildings to stand up," she admitted, her voice cracking. "And the layout looks so boring."

Leo smiled, stepping inside. "That's because you need structural supports. And maybe a little color." He pulled out a set of lightweight balsa wood strips. "If we use these as frames inside the bottles, they'll stand perfectly. And look—I sketched a layout where the wind turbines are integrated into a central park, rather than just a grid."

Sam opened his laptop. "I formatted your report into a professional booklet with a table of contents and clear headings. I also noticed a few typos in the energy section, so I corrected them."

As they worked together late into the evening, Maya watched her classmates in awe. Leo's artistic eye transformed the dull cardboard into a vibrant, futuristic green space. Sam's meticulous organization turned her chaotic pile of notes into a flawless presentation. Maya realized that her typed outline, while thorough, lacked the imagination Leo brought and the polished structure Sam provided.

When they presented their model the next morning, the class erupted in applause. Maya looked at the floating solar balloons Leo had convinced her to add, and the perfectly aligned streets Sam had measured.

"Great job, team," Maya said, and for the first time all week, she truly meant it.

1. In the beginning of the story, why does Maya decide to do most of the project herself?

- ☐ **A** She wants to prove to the teacher that she is the smartest student in the class.
- ☐ **B** She believes Leo and Sam are not capable of contributing high-quality work.
- ☐ **C** She prefers working alone because she dislikes Leo and Sam personally.
- ☐ **D** She was explicitly instructed by the teacher to lead the group and do the work.

Answer: B. She believes Leo and Sam are not capable of contributing high-quality work.

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2. Which event represents the turning point (climax) of the story?

- ☐ **A** The teacher assigning the group project to Maya, Leo, and Sam.
- ☐ **B** Leo suggesting a floating city with solar-powered balloons during their first meeting.
- ☐ **C** Maya admitting she needs help when Leo and Sam arrive at her house on Thursday evening.
- ☐ **D** The class erupting in applause during their presentation the next morning.

Answer: C. Maya admitting she needs help when Leo and Sam arrive at her house on Thursday evening.

3. How does Maya's character change from the beginning of the story to the end? Support your answer with specific evidence from the text. (2 pts)

Answer: At the beginning, Maya is controlling and distrustful, dismissing Leo's ideas and assigning minor tasks because she believes she must do everything to get an A. By the end, after experiencing failure and seeing her partners' valuable contributions, she learns to trust them and appreciate their unique strengths, concluding with 'Great job, team,' and truly meaning it.

Part 2: Paragraph Response

4. Theme Analysis: Write a well-structured paragraph (5–7 sentences) explaining a theme of *The Synergy of Three*. In your response, discuss how Maya's character development helps reveal this theme. Use at least two pieces of evidence from the story to support your analysis. (4 pts)

Answer: A central theme of 'The Synergy of Three' is that true collaboration requires trust and valuing everyone's unique strengths. (Other well-supported interpretations, such as the importance of humility or overcoming pride, are also acceptable.) At the beginning, Maya is controlling and distrustful, believing she must do everything herself to get an A. However, when she faces disaster on Thursday night, she is forced to accept help. Leo's artistic eye and Sam's meticulous organization transform the project. Maya realizes that her partners bring essential skills she lacks, and her character change from controlling to appreciative reveals the theme that working together produces a better result than working alone.